



Department of Economic and Community Development

Regional Strategic Plans Executive Summary

In April 2011, Governor Bill Haslam released the Jobs4TN plan, a roadmap for the future of economic development in Tennessee.

The plan focused the efforts of Tennessee's Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) on strategic business clusters where Tennessee has a distinct competitive advantage.

Jobs4TN emphasized aiding existing Tennessee businesses to grow and expand in addition to adding resources and senior leadership talent to accomplish the long-standing goal of recruiting new businesses and jobs to the state.

A key underpinning of the Jobs4TN plan is the decentralization of ECD into nine distinct regions – home to the jobs base camps - across the state, following the existing boundaries of the state's nine development districts.

During the course of the last eight months, ECD's nine new regional directors focused their energy on working with ECD business development staff along with the extensive network of local economic development officials and other stakeholders to coordinate and focus state, regional and local resources to more fully support expansions of existing Tennessee businesses. They also participated heavily in new business and industry recruitment.

The regional directors through a variety of outreach efforts, stakeholder meetings and consensus building activities spent much of 2011, since their appointments, creating targeted strategic plans for each of their regions.

These plans outline how ECD's regional staff will:

- Lead new efforts and initiatives in their regions.
- Support existing local economic development organizations.
- Serve as an effective conduit between the department and regional stakeholders.

ECD Commissioner Bill Hagerty encouraged the regional directors and their staffs to develop these plans in close coordination with the many local and regional stakeholders that comprise the economic development community in each region.

The ECD regional staffs used a variety of methods to develop consensus in their regions about how the newly decentralized ECD structure will be effective. In some regions, local stakeholders already had existing strategic plans for their own organizations, and those were reviewed and incorporated. In other situations, large stakeholder meetings were needed to bring different economic development forces together, or combinations of these two approaches were used as well as one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders.

The results are nine distinct plans tailored to their individual regions of the state while common themes run through many of the plans.

Best Practices

Throughout the state local economic development officials in predominately rural regions expressed a need for more training. ECD regional staffs will offer best practices training to assist economic development officials in dealing with recruitment prospects, including requests for information and requests for proposals.

Stemming from positive feedback out of this year's Governors Conference, regional directors will also offer more general training for local economic development officials on best practices for broader recruitment techniques and technical assistance programs for manufacturers to help them remain competitive.

In the Southern Middle region, the ECD staff is holding regional training sessions for local economic development professionals on best practices for answering prospect company requests for information and requests for proposals.

Northern Middle Tennessee regional staff will have a broader approach, offering training to interested economic development offices on national best practices for recruiting. ECD staff will offer customized training sessions to interested organizations, with interest anticipated from more rural areas of the region.

Allen Borden, ECD statewide director, is charged with implementing best practices programs for use in all our regions where stakeholders express a need.

Businesses Development

Governor Haslam's Jobs4TN plan revealed that more than 86 percent of all new jobs in Tennessee are created by existing businesses.

Feedback from businesses across the state and from local economic development partners showed the need for a continual outreach to Tennessee businesses.

ECD regional staff will work in collaboration with local chambers and economic development offices to reach out to existing businesses while local economic development professionals take more of a lead in larger markets. In more rural areas, ECD regional staff will coordinate with local chambers and economic development offices to make sure the largest employers are covered, expansion opportunities are fully explored and state incentives are explained thoroughly.

ECD regional staff will also play a vital role in all nine regions in the business recruitment process. ECD staff often serves as a point of contact and coordination during prospect visits to the state.

The East Tennessee regional staff and their regional partners are launching an effort to inventory companies in the region that fall within the six targeted clusters of the Jobs4TN plan. ECD staff and regional stakeholders will then contact suppliers of those companies to see if co-location makes sense.

Other regions like Northwest and Southeast will pursue aggressive visit schedules and coordinate larger market visits with local chambers and economic development organizations.

Partnerships

ECD regional staff, through their outreach and stakeholder meetings, identified areas where strategic partnerships are needed to engage the Jobs4TN plan.

Those areas include:

- Tech transfer from research institutions
- Workforce development efforts
- Innovation support at regional business accelerators
- And early stage capital investment to support Tennessee entrepreneurs.

Regional directors and their staffs will pull together stakeholders in these areas and others to facilitate new partnerships supporting the goals of Jobs4TN.

One of the more crucial areas where partnerships and new avenues of communication are needed is in the workforce development arena. In several regions, ECD staff plan to play a "match making" roll between large employers and workforce development resources.

In the Greater Memphis region, ECD staff and the staffs of local workforce development boards will work with the new WINRECRUITS.com database to cross-reference employer need and employee availability.

ECD staffs see a need to partner with the new business accelerator grant winners in some way - from connecting the incubators to rural entrepreneurs to helping the incubators find sustainable funding.

Enhanced Communication

ECD regional directors are uniquely positioned to facilitate communication between different local and regional economic development partners.

Enhanced communication will come in different forms depending on the needs of the region. ECD regional staff members are playing a role in a variety of new efforts, including:

- Regional industrial site inventories
- Development of marketing materials
- Regular stakeholder meetings
- And aligning workforce development programs with employer need.

In addition, ECD's regional directors play a unique role interfacing with other state agencies to facilitate the needs of Tennessee businesses as they expand and grow jobs in our state.

In many cases this enhanced communication will mean ECD regional staffs fostering more regional thinking and planning among peer organizations.

In the Upper Cumberland region ECD staff and regional partners will host an innovation forum that highlights the importance of entrepreneurship and technology in job creation. The event will connect entrepreneurs with resources for accessing capital, mentors and innovation networks.

The Northeast Tennessee ECD regional staff will play a role in a consortium of stakeholder organizations that will develop an external marketing plan for the region in 2012 including trips to trade shows in key sectors and collateral promotional material.

Across several of the regions an industrial site inventory program is also in the works as no such resource now exists.

Conclusion

ECD's nine regional strategic plans are living documents to be revisited with stakeholders and other local economic development players on a regular basis. These plans are the first step in framing the roles of these new regional staffs and the jobs base camps. It is clear that a new decentralized model operating at a more granular level in concert with local economic development forces will allow more effective marshalling of all resources to support Tennessee job growth. The results will play a major role in making Tennessee the No. 1 state in the Southeast for high quality jobs.